



THE
WOOLMAN
SEMESTER

Sustainability Project: Sense of Place at Woolman

By Annelise Hildebrandt

Woolman Semester

Spring 2011

Woolman Lane

by Sierra Curtis-McLane

C G C F
When you're driving up down Woolman Lane the sign says take it slow.
C G F G
as you coast by orchard, barn and field the cows look up and low
C G C F
and the hummingbirds buzz circles 'round the sheep out on the mow
C G C
when you drive down Woolman Lane

F C G Am
Woolman Lane land of California gold
F C G G
where the tarweed blooms like sunrise and the oaks are kings of old
F C G Am
Where the tractor breaks on Mondays and there's wood ants and there's mold
F C G C
We're living life in the light at the end of the road.

When you're at the end of Woolman Lane you've reached the Woolman School.
Where we teach of peace and justice and use vegetables for fuel
and the students wax like Chomski and can outwork any mule
When you're at the Woolman School

Woolman Lane, land of California gold
where the days are bright with sunlight and the nights are starry cold
where the chapters of our lives are sometimes messy to unfold
We're living life in the light at the end of the road.

When we plant our feet on Woolman Lane they grow up with the peas
and between the stones of loamy soil we strive to be like trees
and in circles we hold joys and help to bear uncertainties
with our feet on Woolman Lane

Woolman Lane, land of California gold
where the people dream of someday and the story's not fortold
and we struggle to be one with all the values that we hold
We're living life in the light at the end of the road.

I WOULD LIKE TO
 THANK THE JOHN WOOLMAN SCHOOL.
 YOU HAVE BEEN MY HOME AND MY
 FAMILY. THAT IS SOMETHING THAT I CAN
 NEVER REPAY. I WILL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL.
 I HAVE FAITH IN THE POWER AND THE
 BEAUTY OF THIS LAND, AND IT WILL ALWAYS
 BE SACRED IN MY HEART. THIS IS A PLACE OF
 MAGIC TO ME, FULL OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE TAUGHT
 ME TO LAUGH, LOVE, AND CRY. I BELIEVE THE ONLY
 CURE FOR GRIEF IS LAUGHTER. LOVE'S NOT
 TIME'S FOOL. YEASTERDAY I DID NOT THINK THAT
 TODAY IT WOULD BE RAINING. THERE IS A LIGHT
 DON'T LOOK WITH YOUR EYES ALL THEY SHOW IS
 LIMITATION. LOOK WITH YOUR HEART AND
 YOUR UNDERSTANDING. IN THE DARKNESS
 AND THE DARKNESS
 HAS NOT YET
 OVERCOME
 IT.



John Woolman School



YEAR OF THE
TRACTOR

Emily's Page

This Picture Shows How I Have Been Towards The School.

Don. You were my life this year. I want to always know you're there for me. You've given me so much love.



I want to thank Neal Esche BRIAN and Susan for driving me to the gym. Amen.

e. You are my comfort and instant support. I love you.

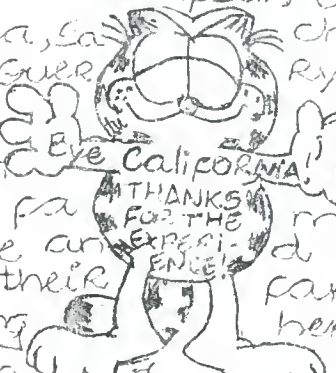


Hey, DO NOT SKIPP THIS PAGE, I WANNA TELL YOU SOMETHING IMPORTANT, OK?!

We KNOW THAT SOMETIMES LEAVE THE PLACE THAT YOU LOVE (IN THIS CASE YOUR COUNTRY) SCARES YOU AND MAKES THINGS HARD FOR A WHILE. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, HOW YOU GONNA BE TREATED LIVING IN A PLACE THAT MAYBE YOU EVEN NEVER HEARD ABOUT BEFORE, YOU WANNA GO BACK TO "YOUR SMALL WORLD", SPEAK YOUR OWN LANGUAGE, HAVE YOUR FAMILY & FRIENDS THERE FOR YOU AND BE THERE FOR THEM WHEN IT'S NEEDED. I KNOW THAT'S HARD, ESPECIALLY AT THE BEGINNING, BUT TRY TO NOT LISTEN TO YOUR FEARS, TRUST IN YOURSELF, BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, GET THE BEST POSSIBLE AND GIVE YOUR BEST. REMEMBER THAT YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE TO DECIDE HOW YOU WANT TO LIVE, EVEN IF SOMETHING DOESN'T GO AS YOU WANTED TO, BUT LEARN WHAT YOU CAN (THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING!) FROM IT AND ADD IN YOUR LIFE. AND BEYOND THAT, IS IT GOOD TO BE ABLE TO JUST NOT COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE FROM ANOTHER PART OF THE "BIG WORLD" BUT TO SHARE ABOUT YOURS AND CHECK THEIRS OUT; THAT EXPANDS YOUR POINT OF VIEW ABOUT LIFE SO MUCH!

I WANNA THANK EVERYBODY, EVEN THE PEOPLE THAT

DIDN'T SUPPORT ME BECAUSE I LEARNED FROM IT ANYWAY. AND I HAVE SOME SPECIAL THANKS TO: ROSA LOPEZ, BRIAN FRY, DOUG THE GOOD CLASSES; SUZANNE MORRISON, SARAH KELLER, KIT BAILEY, LISA, CAROL, CRISTA, DENNIS, KAT BAILEY, BOB SADDAR, GUERIN, RY, SWONE, PAUL, LAWREN, M. LUCIA HOLLORAN, AND A M PITHA & HEIDI J. EDGELL; SHEETS & EYE CALIFORNIA! YOU THAT WORKED WITH THE SCHOOL TO MAKE THIS EXPERIENCE BE POSSIBLE AND SURE TO THE BENTT'S FOR INCLUDING ME IN THEIR FAMILY BEING SO LOVELY WITH ME HERE WHEN I NEED IT WASN'T EASY, BUT YOU WOULD NEVER HAVE MADE IT!!



THANKS FOR THE EXPERIENCE

I HAD SO MUCH FUN WITH ALL OF YOU. I HAD CHARACTEREN LET MY PARENTS SEE ME BY THEMSELVES A LITTLE BIT & IT'S TIME TO GO BACK HOME, BECAUSE I AM WAITING FOR MY SOONER. THAN I THINK...



Bye California! I Love you all!

Woolman Land

5/26/2011

I remember

The dusty road, going into the school from Jones Bar Road

The pastor with the animals

Stepping gingerly around poop

Cleaning out the chicken cages and yard

The banks of the pond and the insects who would live on the water

The dusty road going from the classroom to the dormitory

The road being covered with snow in the winter time

The road being muddy with rain

The path through the field to the dorm being muddy and slippery

Slipping, not happily, and falling not on the grass but on my nose.

The tree and the pastor standing as a sentinel for us scholars to be

The vegetable beds between the classrooms and John Smith's house

The vegetables coming up in the spring and providing good nutrition for the local animals

In the winter the rustling creek would sing to the cold growth on its lips

The pastor on the other side of the creek where we would have flashlight capture the flag contests at night and discovering rocks where I did not think there should be rocks

Gold panning in the creek

Tasting berries but I cannot remember where the berry bushes were

Bob Barnes teaching welding in the dirt outside the toolshed

Our sculptures dancing to different homes around campus

Never achieving my result to walk around the perimeter of campus

Wanting to have a list of all the plants, trees, and shrubs on campus and never making it and never contributing to it

Two students collecting different kinds of rocks they found on campus, several of them looked like the same kind of rock to me, but they had discovered the differences that distinguished them

Peeing in the bushes all over campus at night thinking I was a good guy and why didn't everyone else do it and if they did would the whole campus smell like a urinal?

The footprints of the goose or was it a swan? And the goat who used to hang around the central fields

The sound of the stampede of student feet as we tramped around campus together

The smell of the grass

Putting my nose against the bark of the trees but I don't remember the individual smells

Putting things in the ground, the basketball pole

Lying on the ground next to my favorite girlfriend

Lying on the ground looking at the stars with my roommate

Lying on the ground all alone just waiting for it to sing to me

Hiding things in holes in the ground

Forgetting where the holes were

Dirk Neyhart 1963-1965

Dear Woolman,

For me, Woolman is my "hometown." I moved to Woolman in 1968 with my parents when they joined the faculty. I remained there until my own graduation in 1985. As a "staff brat" Woolman was like an extended family to me. The faculty were like bonus parents, the other children of faculty like bonus siblings and the students that came and went mentors and friends. I grew up exploring the 300+ acres that make up the campus, splashing in the streams, following the deer trails through the manzanita. The lessons I learned living within a close knit community stay with me to this day and steer the way I move in the world to this day. Many Woolmanites remain in my life to this day and whenever I feel the need for grounding I reach out to those people. I still come back to Woolman to visit most every summer. I still love how dark it gets at night and how bright the stars are. I love to sit on the sloping lawn outside the dining hall above what used to be the duck pond and run my fingers through the thin blades of grass remembering graduations and community meetings gone by. I hope that Woolman will always be there for me to return for these visits because if it was not to be there it would be like the loss of my "hometown".

Ann (Croninger) Zadeh, class of 1985

Saturday, May 21st 2011

Dear Woolman,

There are a few things I wish I had known before attending the Woolman Semester. The time flies so fast, and there are so many experiences to be explored that by the time the semester is over, one has totally missed out on them or maybe has just gotten a taste. That is one thing in itself that I wish I had known. However, now I believe that it was better for me to learn firsthand how time moves and how to "seize the day", as they say. Regardless, if I could tell anybody attending the Woolman Semester or visiting Sierra Friends Center a few things not to miss, they would be as follows:

1.) Spend As Much Time In/At/Around The Yuba As Possible: There is no better way to understand the land you live on and the life surrounding it than spending your hours, days, and weeks on its rivers. The Yuba has healing and cleansing powers, centers those in need of inner calm, and lifts the spirits of those in need of uplifting. Water is such a contentious issue in California, and when you can appreciate the Yuba, and all of California's waterways for that matter, you better understand the culture. Few things mean as much to me as the Yuba River, and few experiences compare to diving into the cold, green-blue water on a hot day.

2.) Enjoy Your Dish Crew: Yes, cleaning thirty peoples' dishes when you have a big project to turn in is not exactly most peoples' idea of a good time. However, it was at Woolman that I learned how important it is to do the dishes. Too often I encounter people with grand schemes of how they will change the world, who don't see the necessity of doing the dishes, and are content to leave them sitting in the sink expecting somebody else to do them. The ways we work together in the kitchen, cleaning together, singing together, getting to know each other, should represent a microcosm of how we want our communities to look. When do we take turns washing our dishes? When do we do our own dishes? How does not washing our dishes affect others? Inevitably, questions will arise, as will quarrels and arguments, and we need to know that confronting those issues build community. So relish in doing the dishes! Enjoy the feeling of hot, soapy water on your hands! And my recommendation is to sing really, really loud.

3.) Walk In The Woods: Seems like a no-brainer, because they're right there, but it's really easy to forget. Our campus is full of life, some that is apparent, and some that you have to look a little harder to see. In our woods, we can see the interconnectedness of life, take time to look within ourselves and find what's important to us, exercise and keep our bodies healthy, and witness natural beauty that many of us, unfortunately, do not always have the opportunity to live around. Explore the woods every chance you get, and you will be rewarded not only by the natural beauty, but also by tree houses, swings, sculptures, and other surprises that testify to the ingenuity and creativity of students and others who have called Sierra Friends Center home.

There are so many other experiences that I wish I could write about; so many that they could fill up a dozen books. However, part of the Woolman experience is discovering these things for yourself (I just couldn't resist sharing a few). Above all, remember to take a break from your work now and experience all of the other types of learning that are available at Woolman. I continue to carry those lessons with me every day.

Love,
Sol Weiner
Woolman Semester alum, Fall 2008

To all you Woolmanites, preparing for the next big adventure of returning to your own front door step, here is what I have come to know:

I remember all the last goodbyes, and the last meals, and the final printings of my school work. The graduation speech, the lingering moments, it all becomes a big blur, and time passes all too quickly. The idea of home can be daunting, when you just created this whole world for yourself, outside of your family and friends, and now you have to go back to their world, and somehow find a place in it.

When I returned from the long, hard, brilliant, mind-expanding, life-changing experience of Woolman, and I walked off that plane into dead of winter New York, I felt like I was so full. I was a balloon, so filled with new knowledge and new ways of looking at the world. I had imagined myself sharing all this with my friends, and using NVC to solve all my problems, and I thought people would see and honor the change in me. I expected too much. The blast of mainstream America shot at me full force, and I clung by the clippings of my fingernails to the bubble we had created at Woolman. My family and friends were yanking me back into the world I wanted to leave behind. Somehow, my expectations didn't quite meet the reality of it all. My blown up bubble deflated over the time I was home, because I didn't quite know what to do with all that was coming my way.

This will happen to some extent, because the memory of the happiness you have right now is nothing like actually being in it. In a community like Woolman, a sacred space is created that allows everyone to express and expand together. This magic doesn't quite translate to home life, because you aren't in the same presence of your friends, and workgroups, and classes. The magic is still inside you, you just don't have the same room/space to express it. But keep it in mind, that magic hasn't gone anywhere. It is just lying dormant, and it is up to you to recreate that space for yourself, with your friends, family, a new community, whatever it is. And Woolman will always be there to go back to.

There is a shape that stays behind when you leave home, and give it four months, 2 years, that shape doesn't easily change. People have a certain idea of who you are, and when you return, they can be hesitant to recognize that you have changed, you have grown, you are not the same kid that left 4 months ago. There is a dance to do, in finding your way back into the flow, and in reshaping the mold you left behind. I would say that the most important thing here is keeping open communication with the people around you. In my life, I have hidden so many emotions under the rug when all I had to do was open up the conversation. It takes courage to stand up and say to someone, directly, "I'm pissed off, or I'm feeling sad, or I really love you and appreciate you, lets go hang out!" If you feel something at home, don't be afraid to tell someone about it, and really go there with them. If your parents are babying you and you don't like it, have that conversation with them, use that NVC! People will try to pull you in every direction (quite literally, I've had people yanking on my arms before)

and you just have to stand up for yourself and feel what you feel, know what you want, and be that person you have become, no matter what it takes. Don't take shit!

And back to expectation, because this is something I have struggled with. Throw all your expectation of what home will be like out the window. You don't need it. There is no need to imagine what things will be like when you get off the plane, or when you see your family for the first time. I went home from Woolman, my mind filled with expectation, and my bubble was popped. Don't fight the flow, go with it, and you'll find that your experience is able to manifest itself in a much more natural way than if you try to force it out. Just be present. Feel what is right for you in the moment, and not what you think will be right for you down the road.

And remember, coming back into "the world", that foreign place outside of Woolman Lane, it is a big change. With any change, the best way to deal in my mind is to just surrender to it. Accept what comes, and appreciate it because it makes you grow. Appreciate the things that bring you the greatest joy, and appreciate the things that bring the greatest sorrow. The important thing is that you accept them, and forgive them. And once all is said and done, you are free to be on your way, YOUR way, nobody else's. We hold on to who we are, and who we have become, by forgiving the world and its antics, by saying, "I see you want me to fit back in to that mold, that square I once fit into, that old dress. Well, fuck that, I'm done with that, thank you! But I appreciate your offer :)"

Beyond the transition home from Woolman, which is inevitable, the power of what you have created will always be there to tap into. Connect with your fellow Woolmanites, they are the only ones who can truly understand what you have just gone through. You can bring everything and everyone along with you, and draw from that source whenever your heart desires. You don't have to go home alone.

Best of luck,

Ruby Brinkerhoff, Fall Semester, 2009.

Dear Woolman Students,

Remember that feeling you got when you learned something totally new at Woolman? Even though sometimes it really sucked because it was like staring injustice and oppression in the face, in a way, it was almost like being a little kid again and it felt like your brain was taking steps on the moon. It's fresh! Cutting edge! Untelevised and possibly undermicrowaved or not microwaved at all and unshaven and you are with other people your age who are in love with that Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeroes song that is truly is so catchy and you go on hippie dippie van rides to crazy places where you do good! And you learn stuff! You are so hot and the Yuba is so cold and your brain is so ready to accept new things, so everything is aligned. But then December comes. Rain comes in cold, angry sheets. Maniacal thoughts of keeping warm by means of cuddling with human beings rather than by utilizing modern space-blanket technology fill your over- taxed brain. This is when you know that the entire world has gone crazy, and then it hits you: you realize the world you live in will never quite accept the brotherhood and sisterhood of the human race over total apocalypse and zombies who look like Glenn Beck will roam the earth and clearly things are sad and gloomy. In this dark, dreary nightmare world, stock markets crash as gleeful, oily business folk smoke cigars wrapped with money from third world countries and SUVs run over peoples' dreams. Again, lots of uncool stuff going on in the world. This sucks. But then, after the rainstorms of winter, a light peeks over the mountains. What is it? It's that feeling again! That feeling you get when you learn something that you didn't even know existed before right now, and now that you know it, there's no turning back! You feel all the love, and the hate; the anger and the empathy and antipathy and sympathy and silliness because issues have many faces and they are not so black and white. Remember how you wanted to grab it and tackle it because it wouldn't let you sleep at night? And all the plans that you made late at night as your roommate was catching up on reading and you were pretending to sleep, plans to deal with this issue immediately upon waking up? Well, remember what that feels like. And how much passion it instilled in you. Remember it good because school at home is going to try to

make you forget what that felt like. If your schools at home really taught you anything, the Department of Education would shut them down, yelling "treason!" and "socialism!" Don't forget what that feeling of true learning feels like; because even though your school at home and the world at large aren't going to take you outside under a tree and sit you in a circle with like-minded people, if you remember what it feels like to learn, you'll always be able to seek out truth. You'll want it more than you want to watch television or even play video games, which sounds crazy now, but I assure you is not really crazy at all. It's not always easy in a society that wants you to accept the status quo, and their idea of what your place in it is. But you gotta remember that feeling! If you forget everything you learned about at Woolman, for the love of John Springsteen and all that is holy, do not forget the feeling you get when you learn, really learn, and go do what you gotta do to keep on feelin' it.

Love,

You Friend Sol

Dear Fellow Woolmanites,

As the dreaded day of saying goodbye to a place that has transformed your mind, body, and soul quickly approaches, remember that it is okay to let your guard down even further than it already is and just cry. It can be extremely overwhelming to pour your heart out on a stage and share the experiences that have so much changed you as a person to a meeting house full of strangers, friends, and family. As I write this note to you, I start thinking back to my graduation speech and not being able to say anything but "thank you" because tears of sadness and the emotions of facing a world outside of Woolman crept upon me and paralyzed me with fear. I look back every day and remember the unique beauty of Woolman. The energizing classes and truly amazing individuals that I shared four short months of my life with in a cabin in the chilly, sparse woods of Northern California are the memories that have forever changed my life. Those smart and crazy tree-hugging individuals are my best friends and the backbone that keeps me striving to learn and want more out of life. May 28th, 2010 is a day that still haunts me with long hugs and tearful goodbyes to the ones that I love dearly, but I hold that love and power in my heart and carry it with me through times of sadness, moments of joy, and bits of pure insanity.

I honestly can't remember arriving back home. I know that my head felt foggy and no one seemed to truly understand what I was going through. This made me feel so isolated and I eventually retreated to a garden that I had been working on. I would sit down there and cry the day away! I became so frustrated that not even my closest family friends wanted to hear the full story of my adventures in California and I had to construct a short response when asked "how was Woolman?" in order keep them satisfied. It tore my heart out to be forced to sum up a life-changing experience in just a few words. I have found that even today, the only people who can share the magic of making a fire in a woodstove to stay warm at night are the ones that have graduated Woolman and can relate to the satisfaction of a hissing fire you made and the scent of burning pine smelled by your roommates. Keep in contact with your Woolman friends and know that they would jump to rescue you in a heartbeat!

Here are a few things to do that helped me adjust to being back in civilization,

- 1) Keep busy! I did chores around the house, cleaned and rearranged my room, alphabetized our DVD and CD collection. You name it, I organized it!
- 2) Start a flower or vegetable garden. As I mentioned before, I had started a flower garden down in the corner of my lawn. I went around to houses and asked if anyone needed help thinning out their flowers and I ended up with tons of beautiful transplanted flowers and plants!
- 3) Get a job! I worked for a little bit at a local consignment shop. Unfortunately, the owner went out of business, but it was a great opportunity to work and help support my local community.

4) Show your artistic side. During our Wilderness Trip, we went to a beach that had thousands of pieces of sea glass. Well, I brought all of those pieces home and started making jewelry. It was a good way to let go of my frustrations and make something beautiful!

5) Last, babysit. I do not necessarily like children, but they are great listeners and love to hear stories! It was a way for me to share everything without holding back.

I wish everyone about to graduate Woolman the best of luck and know that although the Woolman Semester is about to end, the experiences, stories, and memories will never leave your side

Dear Woolmanite,

You've been livin' it up at the Woolman Semester for around four months now. If you're like me, you fell in love with your cabin, Althea, all of your teachers, the faculty, that really cool dude with the huge gray beard who is like 7 feet tall whose name I forgot, the delicious food, the interns, and pretty much every other aspect of Woolman. But now you have to go home! What's up with that? I mean, come on... You just went through the most life changing and emotionally rigorous four months possible and now you're expected to just hop on a plane and go home to a family that has no way of understanding of how much those four months meant to you? Nope, first you have to get up on stage in front of like fifty people and talk about that one time in Global Issues with the..., and that other time in Pottery when you..., and who could forget last Thursday's lunch with the cheese and the..., and then explain how you will take all of these memories with you wherever you go when in all reality you haven't even accepted the fact that you're leaving in less than 24 hours (and more importantly, where the hell did you leave your shoes?).

I guess what I'm trying to say is: the end of Woolman is like a bunch of run-on sentences where no one cares about punctuation and you have to read a few times to understand. It's kind of like waking up from a really good dream but it's also like getting dumped by a really cute girl (don't worry, you totally deserve better). Inevitably, you're about to go through a pretty serious transition from the surreal life to the real life. Soon you'll be standing on the stage bullshitting a speech that you definitely didn't rehearse (or even think about till you got on stage for that matter). What's important is not letting the thought of going home get in the way of having as much fun as you possibly can in the last week. Here are a few things I did in the last week:

1. Went swimming in my boxers in the Yuba river
2. Had a co-ed slumber party the last night in cabin H
3. Woke up at 5AM and walked around on the pond (it was frozen)

After Woolman, my dad and I went skiing in Kirkwood, CA. It was, without a doubt, the best way I could imagine ending the semester. Obviously you won't all choose to go skiing (some people prefer snowboarding) but I absolutely recommend you do something that is both really fun and reminds you of home.

If you don't decide to hide out in the space under cabin A (there is a door on the side facing the stream), you'll eventually be sitting on your comfortable couch in your living room bored shitless (if you've forgotten, boredom is that thing that happens when you finished all of your homework and the only thing on TV is Jersey Shore). Honestly, you don't know how much you missed being bored until you finish Woolman. Unfortunately, it's very easy to get caught up in the blissful life of a couch potato. So after you get home and take a nice long nap on your couch, go out and start something new. I started an internship with a website development company and took classes at a college while finishing high school. Now, I'm taking a gap year and working for a film production agency. And guess what! Unlike a good dream or an ex-girlfriend, Woolman will let you sleep over whenever! I'm going back for 3 weeks this February and I'm so excited. So have fun now, have fun when you get home, and, most importantly, never forget and leave the vents all the way open on your woodstove when you go to bed. Only kidding, never forget your four months and keep up with everyone from your semester. Oh, and when you get called during the biannual phone-o-thon, donate!

Colin Ulin

Dear Woolman,

When I read my letter to myself, it mentioned the Laura reading it would no longer know the Laura writing it. I was dead on when I said that. I am a different person. I so often race through experiences without having a letter from my past demanding me to stop and acknowledge this new Laura.

When I did that I found that I now know I can't solve the world's problems, but I know I can create change. I now know that I honestly have no idea about anything and the amount there is to know is just overwhelming, yet I feel more comfortable forming my own opinions. I now know that I can question as often and as much as I want, because I can rest assured that there isn't a lack of perspectives and answers. I now know that I can be helpful when it comes to growing plants and that working in ankle deep manure is fun. And that mud and grass stains are accepted accessories to your outfit. And that a lot can be discussed over warm fires and tea, and that it is possible to look like your in excruciating pain and be laughing at the same time, and that Inception is a fantastic movie, but even better is the fact that the theme song makes any situation better. I now know that genetically engineered tumbleweeds are a much more real risk in the future than I could have ever imagined, and that letters to the land can be sustainable and that some of us are so deprived of meat that chasing a turkey across campus is not out of the question and that I eat corn more than I would ever have liked to imagine, and perhaps most shocking...I know now that 5'3 can be considered "hobbit sized".

They say you can never step in the same river twice because it is always moving on....and it sucks that we all have to move on and possibly never see each other again, but then again the people we were at the start of the semester aren't the same people in this room now. We are no strangers to change. All you have to do is accept it and remember to stop every once in a while and get to know the new person that you have become. Just like a river, you will always be moving on and you will never be the same person twice. It been amazing to get to know the changed Laura and it's been incredibly awesome to get to know each of you in the place you are now, as the person you are now. I know the people you will become can only be more amazing. Thank you guys for making me laugh and question. It's been a blast.

Love, *Laura Farley*

Thursday, May 12, 2011

Dear Woolman,

It feels silly writing to you on a lap top. You deserve beautiful cursive writing (or at least my kindergarten style scribbling) on handmade earthy paper with silly drawings sketched in the margins. Well, you know as well as I do that in the last two weeks of classes, I just don't have time for that—there are YAPs to correct, advisee meetings to be had to talk about the dreaded transition ahead, final classes to spend hours planning to the T and then not have enough time to implement, and then there's a Banjo to be walked and dishes to be washed and a meeting house to vacuum and an NVC conversation with my mother... and... and...

When describing my life at Woolman, I have often talked **about the paradox of simultaneously "Living the Dream" and constantly struggling.** I've been told that this is the mystery of life or that it builds character, though that doesn't make it easier. On the other hand, I know so few other people outside of this little bubble who feel as fulfilled as I do in my job. I am just grateful to have seen a dream come true. It truly has been a wonderful example of positive manifestation.

Red and I didn't know what was ahead for us and at that chapter in our story we had a lot of time on our hands, as we were traveling for a year around the world. We had also just seen "The Secret", a movie that swears **meticulously visualizing what you want to happen in your life will attract those things right to you.** And so we did. We thought and thought and daydreamed and sketched and planned and pondered and combined those things in life that each of us was good at with those things in the world that we were passionate about and matched them up to see what we do to affect positive change on this crazy planet. After almost a dozen countries traveled, our next step towards creating this reality became clear. I was accepted to The United Nations University for Peace and Red was taken in as an intern at Mastatal Sustainable Living Community, both located in Costa Rica. Each of these individual experiences, school for me and trade learning for Red, kept us scheming on our future plans. **In fact, I was able to tailor my entire program to be focused towards achieving this dream we had cooked up, while he was learning the ins and outs of community living, running a nonprofit and sustainable building.**

It was called Project Ahimsa. Ahimsa is a Sanskrit word meaning **"active non-violence."** It was going to be a Youth Activist Training Summer Camp and I visualized the crap out of that camp. In fact, I have everything from power point presentations, to a business plan, several academic papers, and an entire notebook filled with details such as what type of trees will grow there to prove it. I just now searched my computer and came up with this small excerpt from one of those papers:

PROJECT AHIMSA:

Creative, Confident, Empowered, Sustainable, Active, Aware, Connected

The Project is a holistic program that will train young people to be leaders of the "Global Justice Movement" through Peace Education, Environmental Sustainability, Social Action, and Expressive Arts.

This program will consist of a 4 stage curriculum that would be implemented as a summer camp for adolescent boys and girls. It will be holistic peace building camp (mixed with farm based education) that

teaches children coming of age techniques for fostering inner peace as well as tools toward becoming responsible community and global citizens.

The proposed program would aim to change not only beliefs and attitudes, but behaviors through an array of media and activities including discussions, videos, role-playing, dramatic and visual arts, and work on the farm.

The Project will be a flexible program that ideally would function as a summer camp in the United States. The best possible location would be a small organic farm complete with sustainable building and energy sources on 35+ acres. It is very important to be close enough to a town so that we can be a part of the local community (and perhaps eventually have a community center in town). Being located within a couple hours of at least one major city is equally important so that inner city children can easily access the camp.

Project Ahimsa's Curriculum:

THE ENHANCEMENT OF:

- *Conflict Resolution Skills
- * Awareness of the History of Non-Violence
- *Critical Media Literacy
- *Human Rights Education
- *Respect towards diversity/multiculturalism
- *Ethics oriented attitudes
- *Political Efficacy
- *The causes of violence and degraded quality of living
- *Techniques which foster inner peace such as meditation
- *Promotion of self-esteem via expressive arts, volunteer work, action
- *Engaging youth in volunteer projects locally and abroad
- *Building safe, nurturing, and beautiful community environments
- *Promoting sustainability and connections to the earth via organic gardening

THE REDUCTION OF:

- *violence *aggression *ethnocentrism *powerlessness

This little piece is just a portion of what we had envisioned. Additionally, the camp was going to be both experiential and academic. We were going to use Non-Violent Communication, have an art barn, spend time in the forest and wilderness, and the youth were going to participate in the decisions that affect them.

Towards the end of my school year, a professor who I had worked closely with in designing the camp sent me a job posting for The Woolman Semester. After having read the excerpt above, you can imagine how reading your description gave me shivers for how similar it was to my own idea!

Peace Studies? **CHECK!**

Social Justice? **CHECK!**

Sustainability? **CHECK!**

Youth Empowerment? **CHECK!**

NVC? **CHECK!**

Farming with kids? **CHECK!**

Experiential Learning? **CHECK!**

Activist Toolkits? **CHECK!**

Before I started my master's degree program, I heard the question repeatedly:

What in the World are you going to do with a degree in Peace Education?

Well, I wasn't always sure. I knew I loved my camp idea, but I also knew that I didn't have the resources to get it up and started, nor did I have the management experience yet to run a place like that on my own. I was following my heart. It was both risky and the only way I could be true to myself. But here I am with the Peace Education dream job, acquiring *just* the experience---in the classroom, in the community, in the garden, and through relationships---that I was hoping for. It hit me hardest when on the first day of my first Woolman class; my query for them was turned around and pointed at me:

What do you want to do when you grow up?

This," I was able to say, "This is what I want to do."

Agh! But now, Woolman, I am 3 pages into this letter and I have only described the wonderful way that I found you. I feel like I could write a handful of separate letters; each of them describing a different way that I am connected to you.

One letter would be about your physical presence. For all of your present beauty, I often wonder what you looked like before the miners came and gutted you from the inside out. How big were the trees? Where did the streams flow? It reminds me a little of the Shel Silverstein book, "The Giving Tree" where the human loves the tree so much, but then takes advantage of her for his own selfish desires, all the while the tree just hoping the best for the boy. The current state of your land is more like what would have happened after the boy (then old man) passed on. For although you have regenerated much of your natural beauty, the evidence of the harm that was inflicted upon you for the selfish desires of the past, is still very present. But of course, those were different times and different relationships and who is to say what I would have done as a miner's daughter back in the day? Chain myself to a rock in a radical move for direct action? Probably not!

No matter what occurred in the past, it is the evening light that I love the best. The way that the sunset is reflected upon the tree tops on the hills; softening the greens and blues and other tones of fields and pastures. Since it is spring now, it is less easy to remark upon your other moods. I am distracted by the wildflowers, returning bird songs, and the sound of leaves rustled by a gentle wind. I always loved your forest, but in the quest for wearing out my puppy, my appreciation has grown exponentially. I have never been great at naming tree and plant species, but I certainly notice how many different worlds exist on one patch of land---the tall, majestic evergreens to the woody, tangled bushes and broom scotch and everything in between including sweet little seasonal streams, then rocky, dry hillsides and Mel's pond with its resident Blue Heron.

There have been times when I followed a trail off into nowhere's land only to be led by force of some invisible imp through faerie doorways crawling through pixie passage ways, surely watched by tree gnomes to the ruins of an ancient hideaway, likely built by some naughty John Woolman School student and now inhabited by moss loving elves. Even in the dead of winter, in the pouring rain and heavy gray skies, there is so much life under those trees. Those are the times I love the best. Wait, I guess I have a lot of times that I love the best.

My word, almost 4 pages in and I haven't even mentioned the way we use the land---from the wood we use to light our stoves, the berries we harvest to bake into pies, to the garden that provides so much nourishment! Although, I am still unsure of the green-ness of my own thumbs, I am so grateful

for the abundance that we take from the soil, your soil, our soil---really, a mixture of human labor, science and nature. The attempts at utilizing the sun, the rain, the natural processes for greater sustainability has been more successful at some points than others, but it's a dance we will continue to practice until we will someday get it right.

Another letter to you would be about your non-human inhabitants from the dinosaur-like turkeys, the goofy feathered quail, serene and playful deer, the elusive but ever present bears, the woodpeckers, the banana slugs---oh and then the chickens whom always capture the hearts of at least one student per semester, the cows with their sweet, sweet milk and their devoted keepers, the house cats and now my own little beast, Banjo Blue.

Then there are the visitors: the Quakers in their weekly silence, the family camp with their loving service and sweet bluegrass evenings, the kid's camp filled with laughter and adventure, the zombie Buddhists, the activist workshops, the guest speakers, the male empowerment group and all of the other visionaries and allies that come for whatever reason to spend time on your land. They are all a part of you, too.

I could probably write a book about the school itself. If I didn't get the point across earlier, I believe that the education that we are providing at Woolman is exactly what the world needs right now. It is utilizing the wisdom of years of education models while addressing the failings of our current American public systems. It's a school that teaches as much out of the classroom as it does within it. It is an education that is both local and global, personal and universal. We strengthen hearts, minds and biceps, too. As students, faculty, interns, and directors we are also all teachers, all students sharing our own unique lesson with each other in and out of the classroom. We acknowledge symptoms, but work at the roots. We sing in the kitchen, in the classroom, and sometimes staff meetings and occasionally cry in all those places, too. We seek our own answers, but are satisfied with more questions. We invite rebellion and encourage discomfort. We respect each other's inherent dignity and whatever it was that brought each of us to this place. I could go on and on, but I think you get the picture.

Another letter I would write would be about community. It would be about the way that it ebbs and flows and transforms, each semester, and each year. I would write about tides of students and interns and also the more permanent members: from Basilia, the smallest of the bunch to Lynn, our stoic elder, and of course, Doug (the glue that holds this place together) and Dorothy (matriarch/compassionate mother figure). I would write about music sessions on the back porch of the Redwood House, picking blackberries or cleaning bathrooms with students and co-workers, loud dinners with everyone up in the DH, Talent Shows with hilarious hosts and opportunities to see new sides of each other.

And of course, there could be an entire mini-series written about the challenges of such a life, too. So says the line we often quote, "we don't live in community because it's easy". There are miscommunications and avoided conversations, questions of accountability, and frustrations with murky boundaries. There is the delicate and ever fragile balancing act of being a community, a school, and a school community. Acknowledging the idea of a business hierarchy and a web of friendships and love---sometimes achieved more gracefully than other times. Throw in the factor of crippling financial hardship, challenging city rules about what we can and cannot change about our place, and lifetimes of work to be done with too few people to do it and sometimes the scale appears unrealistically tilted, the stakes are too high, the classes too small, the buildings too old, the gas too expensive, the barriers too high...the the the the the the....sometimes the worries creep in and overwhelm.

But phew, then it's graduation and the students stand up on that podium and speak their hearts like it's the first time that they could truly see them. For some, their minds have been cracked open, their assumptions broken down and their life paths forever altered. For some, they speak about the relief of being truly loved for exactly who they are and the process of discovering their own unique beauty. For others, the effects are less tangible and aren't revealed on stage, but maybe months or years later Woolman will creep up from their subconscious. But on that crazy graduation day, that day full of cooking, speech-ing, cleaning, crying, and goodbye-ing, the scale tips back and we see the power of what we are creating here. You might even say re-creating. To my knowledge, the essence of what I feel on graduation day is the same as what was true for John Woolman School: a sense of holding a space where people come to be (just like my vision of Project Ahimsa):

Creative, Confident, Empowered, Sustainable, Active, Aware, Connected

Next year, I will officially be the longest staying Woolman Semester teacher. This is a fact that is both a source of pride and worry for me. I am equally excited and anxious about the idea of teaching Peace Studies and Global Issues. I think my biggest challenge, as it always has been here, will be deciding what makes it into the curriculum and how to let go of the entire universe of life-changing issues, ideas, articles, and lesson plans that just won't fit. Well, that and the chaos of the transition. But then, I know in my heart that I just need to trust that the classes will take on a life of their own and (eventually, through hard work and experimentation) become exactly what is needed. I can trust that, because that is what has happened to me already here and I think, Woolman, that it is part of your unseen power.

I see this phase of Woolman as though we are turning a corner, though can't quite see just what is on the other side. We are planting precious seeds, though unsure of when the last frost will be. We are confident in the power of our work, but frustrated with restrictions of finances. We are walking the line between hope and fear, but keeping both feet on the land, grounded and facing forward.

Woolman is more than 230 acres of turkeys and poison oak, it is more than a weekly meeting place for Quakers or a struggling semester program where teens are awakened to the world around them and within them or a place for recent college grads to give back while learning to cook and garden or even a peace education dream job. It would be a lot cooler if I could come up with a snazzy poetic way to describe just *what* Woolman really is, but I can't. Hopefully, somewhere amongst all these letters to you, that picture will be painted.

Yours Truly,

Emily

SOMETHING LIFE CHANGING HAPPENED HERE

Dear Woolman,

it was your photos that taught me how to think.



but, this place that gave me the reason.

Love,

LAURA

Dear Woolman,

Through my sustainability project of mapping the Woolman campus, I have spent a significant amount of time in the woods and surrounding property. This has led me to discover some impressive areas, from a forest of manzanita to lthica, crystal tree, and a very pretty stretch of grass on the southeastern edge of campus, where the trees on either side make a kind of natural corridor. The fact that all of these places can be reached within a 15 minute walk is part of what makes this campus so amazing. With each of these places comes a wonderful sense of satisfaction, realizing that generations before went there and witnessed the same beauty.

I encourage all who read this letter to explore the campus, you never know what you may discover in these woods. Not only have I found more wonderful places than I could ever imagine, but I have realized many things about myself in the long walks bushwhacking across campus. Also, be sure to go everywhere you liked in every form of weather. You can't imagine how different everything is in the snow, rain, or hail. Have fun, look around, you live in a beautiful place right now, make the most of it.

Sincerely,

Ian Adair

Dear Woolman,

When I came to Woolman, I had no idea what to expect. I was very anxious about entering a new community for the second time in 6 months. I knew about the program, but did not know about the type of person who attended the program. Of course, upon my arrival, there was an incredibly diverse group of students, faculty, and interns. The one thing everyone seemed to have in common was an open-mind. This trait has been the most enjoyable part of my Woolman experience. It is what has allowed me to feel so comfortable on campus and on our class trips. Most communities I have participated in have been closed off and boundaries were setup between different groups. Obviously, I feel closer with some people at Woolman than others, but at no point have I felt as if someone judged me without getting to know me first.

Woolman has inspired a desire in me to try to break down walls in other communities I participate in later in life. It has demonstrated the possibility of developing relationships between people with no superficial similarities. Next year, I will be at college in a vastly different environment. Hopefully, using Woolman as a model, I can create an environment in which I feel truly comfortable. It will be a difficult task, but for the first time in my life, I am sure I can be at peace in a community. It is not always easy to achieve open-mindedness as our subconscious minds are always making judgments based off of previous experiences and misconceptions. This is why living intentionally is so important. It requires thinking about what you are doing, which brings you to a higher level of understanding about your actions. The level of effort necessary to live intentionally is great, but in my opinion, it is the best way to be truly content with your life.



William Reich

May 11, 2011

Dear Woolmay,

I'll have to say, this place is pretty great. Somethings I'm not likely to forget are boating adventures in mildly leaky vessels ~~on~~ on Mel's pond and beyond, the strange new flora and fauna commonly found in these parts available for me to explore and learn about, and the great evenings and other time spent in Cabin B.

I've never felt so comfortable living away from home before, I can feel at ease here, most any time. It's the perfect size for two, comfortable yet not crowded.

A wood stove in our cabin makes life quite good, add to that a clothes dryer above and a couch beside and there is the ideal combination.

The spacing of our cabin from the eyes next door is likewise just calculated to avoid being lonely. Come time the lights are out, you are quite happily alone. A warm, cozy cabin from ~~the~~ sundown until noon.

Mira Watkins Brown
Egypt Township, North Carolina

Dear Woolman,

In May 2010 I had a chance to share about my experience of going to Woolman during a visit with current students and staff.

I had a great chance to share my experience of being a student at John Woolman School (a Quaker boarding high school in Nevada City, CA) in May of this year on location at Woolman during their Spring Semester. Though the school is now a onetime Semester-only school for high-school students interested in environmental and social change and peace, it is no longer is a four year HS as it was when I was a student from 83-86.

I had a positive life-changing experience as a student at Woolman and I thought it would be great to give an idea of what it was like when I was a student to the current students. It was also a great time to introduce my wife Heidi to Woolman, which she had certainly heard a lot about!

Once I got on campus, 24 years after graduating, I realized that so much was the same though some things were different. The environment was still beautiful and well-kept.

Walking out in the meadow was great. I did wander through the Manzanita to the location of the student-built "Treehouse" and found it lying in a pile on the ground. Close by was a fire circle with fresh wood and was obviously lovingly maintained by someone (I am not recommending open fires in a CA grassland!) Years had passed and some things were different, but the energy of the place was still about learning how to be in a world that needs your help.

I was invited to speak after the silent meeting which happens in the middle of the week. This part of the day is controlled by students and is also a community meeting addressing various needs, like scheduling and keeping aware of upcoming events or responsibilities of students and staff. In addition to staff, students, and interns-Ted Menmuir, current pottery teacher and occasional principal and teacher over the years was there. He was the only contemporary of my time at Woolman who was present.

I spoke about the expectations that Woolmanites had of each other when I attended and of the traditions we honored. I spoke of how much we learned to respect each other and develop healthy relationships with the staff, animals, and environment around us. I talked about how each student experienced being valued as an individual at Woolman, and was empowered to follow his or her own way of being in the world. How I shared that even though some of us experimented with drugs (for example) we never got high when we had homework or work to do in the community and didn't come to class high. We never pressured other students to do drugs or take actions unconsciously. (Of course, this was an ideal, but I think we did pretty well.) That we had these ideals made for a unique environment. I shared that student conduct at Woolman was not so much about rules as understandings about how one lived in community and took advantage of the opportunities of being in the community. While we were students after every break or vacation we would hug each member of the community the first time we saw him or her when we returned to campus.

Mostly, I talked about being encouraged to follow my heart and take responsibility for my life. About taking my studies seriously, working hard in the Woolman community (workjobs), and being an activist in the larger community as I was led to do so. The work for peace, social and environmental justice just naturally grew out of that.

I also talked about being at Woolman and having the experience of community was something one did as an individual, but it was also in the presence and tradition or lineage of others as well. I compared it to the Native American/First Nations tradition of being in a sacred space with "all my relations."

Though the students were there now, the energy of those who had been students and staff before, and even by extension the families of the students who had been touched by the Woolman experience, are present on that land and in that community. Especially at Silent Meeting and graduation, it is clear to me that students take their place in relation to all those who have gone before and even into the future. Such a precious time it was for me at Woolman and speaking there with the students and staff I felt that they knew this preciousness too. They did not have the luxury to experience it for three years as I did, but they clearly appreciated their time at Woolman. I encouraged them to use it well and not get too distracted by the actions which could get them in trouble or out of harmony with the community.

I thanked them for coming to Woolman and taking the time to learn and use their study to help others as well as themselves. I thanked them for the projects of education and activism that they are involved in. I thanked them for listening and half-heartedly apologized for being so emotional.

It is a memory I shall not soon forget.

Sincerely,
John Malcomson 86

May 13, 2016 via May 13, 2011

Dear Woolman,

It's hard to believe it has been 5 years since last I was here. It seems like only yesterday I was strolling across campus toward the dining hall, being drawn by the dinner bell to another delicious and nutritious meal. I wondered on my way down Woolman lane how different this place would be after being away so long, I wondered if there would be new structures on the property, if the curriculum had changed, if the Mel's pond was ever cleaned up and made swimmable. I wondered how the garden might have changed, how many students were in the program, if the school was able to get out from under the pressure of past debt. and if the sense of peace I used to feel here would be the same.

As I drove over the hill and came around to the barn I was relieved and happy to see there was Jerome rolling out fence for the cows, and wow it seems like he has quite a few more cows than before and the barn has been re-painted, the cow-op must be thriving these days. As I continue to the office parking lot I am struck by the sight of three matching hybrid mini-vans with the Woolman Semester logo on the side, and they look new!! The first person I see is Althea, oh Althea how you have grown, you must be 10 or 11 years old now and looking full of life as usual. I ask if Doug and Dorothy are around and she tells me they were finished working for the day and were up on their property in their new house. I learn that the ranch house is now the intern shared space, a place where they can have their own kitchen and lounge space and use the bedrooms for when friends and family visit.

Something must have changed with the finances around here, it seems some of the things we used to dream about have come to be real, and I can't wait to hear what happened. I see Coleman and after a hug and hello I ask him to fill me in. WHAT!! The school received an anonymous donation 3 years ago of 6 million dollars, wahooo that is incredible news. Coleman agrees and tells me to go explore and see the changes. Before I go I ask a bit about the program and enrollment, and he tells me that the curriculum is not much different than when I lived here, that the core courses of peace studies, global issues and environmental science are the same but that the elective options have grown to include math, Spanish, drumming, theatre, ultimate frisbee, soccer, African dance, pottery, photography, and more depending on what interns and community members are willing to teach. He says that there are 25 students this semester and there is a waiting list for the next 2 years!! Amazing, ok, ok I gotta go see the rest of campus.

The office and computer lab is my first destination, I see two new fancy looking printer/copier machines, and the computer lab has been outfitted with 10 desk top

computers and all the students are given mini laptops to use while they are here. On my way to the dining hall i see that the old tennis court space has become an amphitheater of sorts with a stage and bleachers and even lights. I also notice there are more solar panels on top of the dining hall, and that the young fruit trees that we planted years ago are doing well in the orchard with the older apple trees. The kitchen looks basically the same with the exception of the new walk in refrigerator and a few new appliances. The basement cellar is full of canned veggies, dehydrated fruits and a new seed saving closet, sweet. In my excitement I run out of the DH and head for the garden.

As I cross the soccer field I see that field has been lined out and there are nets on the goals, awesome. In the garden I see a huge greenhouse it must be 40 yards long, and a shaded sitting area in the new garden where we talked about having an outdoor classroom. I see that the entire space is now in full production with the Permaculture corner that we envisioned and the chicken fortress with about 30 busy hens. I hear that the Woolman CSA is thriving and actually covering most of the cost of the garden now, that we get local grains and local honey, and that we have partnered with Sun Smile Farms to get what extra veggies we need.

Over in the cabin area I immediately notice the composting toilets and solar showers. I hear from a passing student that humanure is used in the orchard and that 4pm on a sunny day is the best time to get a hot shower. I also find out that there are now four composting toilets on the property!! It's almost dinner time as I hear the first bell, I run quickly over to Madrone Hall to see the new classroom setup and wow is it impressive. the old science lab has been cleared out to make a beautiful open room, there are web cams and projectors, a big screen, white boards and internet ports, there is a large round table with comfortable chairs as well as an open floor space with cushions and blankets and the walls are covered with art and posters, poems and pictures. Well, that's the second bell I can't wait to hear more at dinner about the changes that have taken place at Woolman.

Catching up with Doug at dinner I learned that the storage barn is now a proper wood shop and the area outside has become a nursery with over 200 trees growing in pots. Also it was amazing to hear that Mel's pond is clean and there is even a rope swing and diving board, Doug tells me the summer camp kids are loving it. With all these changes it sure is incredible that the spirit of this place is the same, such a special and unique community and learning environment. a piece of me will always consider this place home, thank you Woolman, thank you community members past and present, thank you interns, teachers and students, thank you donors and volunteers, thank you Woolman.

Red

5/12/2011

Dear Woolman,

If I could convey a message to your property and the future generations that will spend a joy-filled semester here, I would describe how I saw the seasons change from snowy winter to bright green spring. The seasons here are much different than what I am used to in sunny southern California. The high altitude allows for tall pines to flourish and I have journeyed many a time to the top of the proud trees.

I would like to thank the clay-rich soil for supporting the plants we planted in garden class and during shared work. As spring has showed its colors in these last weeks, I am excited to see the tiny green strawberries appearing and can't help but imagine how fruitful the summer months must be. Our 15' section of bed space my group has to plant is beginning to show signs of life now that chances of frost are slim.

I have enjoyed seeing the turkeys strut around, showing off their enormous tails, the lizards sunning themselves, and the deer bouncing through the trees. Many a time I have thought about killing and eating a turkey but I don't think I'll go through with it. I appreciate the land here and I look forward to coming back to visit and see the smiles of future Woolmanites as the seasons show off their beauty.

Cordially,

Francis Leary

May 12th, 2011

Dear Woolmanland,

When I first came here, the dryness of the land in August was totally different than the lush humidity of my home back east. I was accustomed to four dramatic seasons. Here there are really... two. I had read about madrone and manzanita long before coming here and was glad to finally meet them in person. (For the record, madrone looks a lot like the rhododendrons of my childhood in the Delaware Valley.)

I was called out here by a leading (as Quakers say), by a vague vision of a garden in a forest (I would later learn the word *permaculture* and its resonance with this vision and my life), by archetypal evergreen trees that still crop up in my art, and by the ghost of Utah Phillips (whose spoken word I loved when I was a teenager, and who, I learned after I arrived here, loved Woolman.)

This place has helped me to understand and become clear on many things. Through learning about the history of mining in the Sierra and seeing its effects – the canals, tailings and erosion in our woods – I have (re)-learned that even most seemingly wild places have been touched and changed by humans. This is an important lesson for a woman from the built-up suburban East. Learning about mercury poisoning in the Yuba and its tributaries, arsenic issues in our out-of-commission wells, and the invisible ozone that comes to settle here in the summer all helped me to understand that our ecological work can no longer be focused on purity. We've lost that battle. A lot of damage has been done – to the natural world, and by extension to our bodies (connecting environmental issues with health care is another lesson learned here). Instead, we need to focus on regeneration, restoration, and resilience in an altered landscape. I am grateful to Woolman, the land and its people, for helping me to see this, and for inspiring/reminding me to stay grounded in love, ingenuity, and creativity.

The culture around *sense of place* that is so strong at Woolman, and that inspired this most excellent project of Annelise's, has also been an important lesson for me. Talking about relationships with the land – awareness of watersheds and foodsheds, wildlife, human and geological history, etc – helped me to understand that I am actually rooted elsewhere. And that rooted-ness is rare in this day and age, something to be valued, protected, and cultivated. So I am hungry to return to the Philadelphia area with tools and awareness sharpened at Woolman, to thoroughly embrace and love that place that I am from, to be its conscious denizen.

So thank you, Woolman, for calling me out here, for offering up your lessons (which have been many more than are listed here). And thank you, Woolman, for sending me home. I will always remember the sound of the wind in the pines, my wild neighbors (deer, quail, turkey, lizards), the stars and quiet at night, and that view of the mountains while rolling down Woolman Lane. This is where I learned to be a teacher – that I *am* a teacher.

May future generations hold this land as the laboratory for teaching, learning, nourishing, challenging and growing that it has been in my experience. May the healing continue, may it long be a sacred space.

With gratitude and respect,

Angelina Conti
Peace Studies Teacher Fall '09 – Spring '11

Confronting the World Outside Woolman

By Dennis Johnson, Student, Fall 2010

It is my first day back home, my first day back in civilization, yet something is wrong. I am back in the city, treading water in a sea of human apathy and disinterest. I enter a store and I am blinded by all of the advertisements I see. But now, I cannot turn my surroundings on mute. I am painfully aware of every intention behind these products that I consume and in turn consume me. This is what I wanted, right? To have such knowledge to better myself and free me from the prison of ignorance. However, I feel as if a cruel joke has been played on me. It's as if I was Neo and someone had told me about the matrix but offered me no pills.

In such an increasingly interconnected world, I have never felt more alone.

Thus, here is the problem that I was confronted with in the second that I reentered the "real world".

What do I do with all of this encumbering knowledge once the Woolman Semester is over?

I realized that what I felt while I was at school wasn't the real world, but a microcosm of what the world *should* be. I realized that almost every conversation I shared with someone only reinforced my fear that these corporations did not rise to power by some mistake, but by being that good at what they do. Feeling as if I had already been bested by an opponent so far out my league that it wasn't even conscious of my existence, I decided that taking a visit to my high school would be the best place to put the nail in my emotional coffin. Yet, what I saw there did the exact opposite. When I talked to my peers about what I had experienced, they did not sneer at me for disrupting the status quo, but applauded me for giving a name to something they had felt for so long. I found that my generation would no longer be content to stand still and do nothing afterall!

In the end I realized that life at Woolman isn't an example of what life *should be* but what life *could be*. A very real and possible reality for us all.

Graduation Speech
Annelise Hildebrandt
Spring Semester 2011

Woolman has so many layers. So much goes on here that it takes a really powerful microscope or something like that to digest the experience. I haven't reached that point yet. Honestly, I don't think I have yet really acknowledged that this semester is over. How can it be? Woolman has been my wonderful reality for four months, and I have become completely infatuated with the manzanita trees and the silence and the hope and the chaos and the activism and the chickens and the people. However, I do know that Woolman is a heartbreaking, show stopping, overwhelming and wonderful place where minds and hearts open, giving the world a huge dose of peace-loving power.

At least, that's what happened to me. I was a different person when I first drove down Woolman lane, full of expectation, enthusiasm, and excitement. That person was apologetic, nervous about conflict, unsure of their ability to speak against all that they knew must be changed. I was clueless to so much of my own potential and power—honestly, I don't really even remember that person. But I do know that this person threw themselves, myself, into this brand new community of quirky teachers, outrageous interns, and a group of students that would soon become a hilarious and powerful family.

I was ready. I was ready to learn about civil disobedience, protesting, and environmental revolution. I thought I was ready for everything. In reality, Woolman was just ready for me, as I was taken on a wild adventure into the Woolman world of passion, peace, poetry, and an abundance of personal revolutions. I gave Woolman my heart, and in return I have experienced a radical, ridiculous and unbelievable four months

I have had days when I thought "what on earth did I get myself into?," as I attempted to figure out all the emotions that would suddenly bombard me. I have had fights in the computer lab with people who in reality I absolutely love, all-nighters full of coffee and exhaustion, papers that seemed to never end, and contentious and endless community meetings. I thought, "isn't second semester senior year suppose to be easy?" and I wondered if I would ever really finish all the work I had to do, while still thinking about shared work, dinner prep, and maybe finding time for sleep at some point.

But, the Woolman fairies or mystical beings or that something that I know exists and makes Woolman oh so powerful seemed to do all of this on purpose. The hard parts of Woolman are so necessary. Without the endless work, I would have never been so proud to present that ridiculously long paper, or speak my heart out with poetry that brings all my passion, protest, and anger to the surface. And that dance party after the YAP presentation would never have felt so sweet.

And let me not forget all those times when procrastination resulted in way too much popcorn, and those moments when the work was forgotten for a cup of tea in cabin B.

And how I always smiled when I heard Laura's laugh echo through the cabin area, or when Will was blind-sided by dish crew (again), or for Hanna Butchers endless sass and outrageous sense of humor, or for Ian's awkward dance moves and perfect man qualifications, or for Afiya's hilarious and wonderful faces, or another one of David's brilliant and mind-boggling observations, or for Hannah Plowright's quirky and artistic endeavors that continue to blow my mind, or Marco's charming swagger and soda obsession, or for Francis's absurd and unbelievable movie making abilities, or for Rebecca's continued wit and ability to relate anything and everything to Harry Potter, or for Mira's crazy ability to fix and create and sew and stitch the world back together, or those Dajanne shouts that let you all know she's present and ready and accounted for. All of those things make Woolman so worth the work and the struggle and the stress. All those things have made these four months absolutely wonderful and incredible and amazing.

Woolman was never easy, but I have come to believe that the best experiences in life are those that demand honesty and confidence and creativity and courage and compassion and all those other feelings that have seemed to reappeared during this adventure. Woolman was something far better than easy. It was authentic, intentional, full of so much love and passion to change this crazy and beautiful world that we live in.

When I first arrived at Woolman, I was searching for a place where I would feel supported, loved, and empowered to confront the world head on. I was in search of a place that would remind me that I was courageous and confident. I have found that place on Woolman Lane and I am endlessly thankful.

I am thankful for those hilarious moments with all the students that will never be forgotten, and all those other moments that were not as hilarious but so important and equally unforgettable. Thank you Emily for those impromptu and planned advise meetings that allowed me to digest, process, rant and contemplate Woolman and beyond, as well as your classes that helped me discover my thriving activist potential. Thank you Angelina for those classes that made me leave completely confused in that Woolman way that I have come to know so well. Thank you Jacob for those those hilarious and surprisingly educational stories that always proved your overflowing passion for everything environmental. Thank you to every single intern for all the work and kindness and authenticity that makes Woolman function. And thank you to every other person that made my Woolman experience incredible.

Now, I am preparing for my next great adventure, on the edge of something amazing and unpredictable and real. Leaving Woolman today, I realize that I am a poet, an activist, a compassionate individual, a daughter, a powerful youth leader, a future teacher, and a confident and courageous woman with an endless amount of ideas, hopes, fears, and dreams to speak with conviction. I am so ready for all that the world has to throw at me. I am so ready to radically declare global, local, and personal revolution everywhere I go. I am ready, and I hope the rest of the world is too because I plan on blowing its mind.

The Real Story of Woolman

By Ben Kercheval, Student, Fall 2009

When people ask me “how has Woolman been?” I’ll say “good,” “great,” “an experience.” That’s true. It’s also been grueling, heartbreaking, and horrifying. What an amazing, mysterious place in the woods that allows these emotions to coexist peacefully.

It seems when others ask “how has Woolman been?” I’ll be in on this secret of what Woolman really is. Of course it can’t be explained in words or text on a page because it wasn’t experienced that way.

How was it experienced?

In moments in time

Feelings in my gut

Colors in my mind

The most fitting way to describe Woolman would be to share the feelings, moments, and stories that were stitched together by time to make my Woolman.

Here goes...

Woolman is coming out of the woods before a pizza dinner, seeing orchard mists and a setting sun paint the sky.

Woolman is heaving chests, bikes thrown down, and poetry at the summit of Woolman Lane after a grueling ride.

Woolman is the lost structures in the Sierra Foothill forests, rotting and waterlogged, waiting in the undergrowth for future Woolmanites to discover them.

Woolman is singing,

SHOUTING!

laughing,

stomping,

and banging pots and pans.

Woolman is lurking under Madrone Hall with mountains of snowballs waiting for the other students to come, so we can ambush them.

Woolman is thinking like a mountain.

Woolman is the satisfaction of chopping a pine log, smelling the spicy oils, and burning it.

Woolman is conversing in a hammock in a nighttime pasture, hearing the crunch of cows pulling grass from the ground nearby and the heartbeats of those with me.

Woolman is sweating on a hot summer night, shaking my body to the thump of an electric feel.

Woolman is hippies at the BriarPatch, and an old European man in a community garden.

Woolman is raw milk and kilts.

Woolman is talking in Spanish to children in Mexico, dancing for them and giving them rides on our backs.

Woolman is manzanita forests tickling your clothing and hair.

Woolman is cold at night.

Woolman is depression, rebellion, division, and suffocation.

Woolman is saying goodbye.

Woolman is bathing in the ice cold Yuba River, and then resting on warm rocks that hum with an unexplainable presence.

Woolman is crying in another hammock, feeling utterly alone but loved in the arms of a friend.

Woolman is scaling a friendly pine with bark falling on my head from climbers above, and relishing the view splattered with a bloody sunset.

Woolman is the scent of hot compost being carried by the wind to me where I rest on yet another creaking hammock.

Woolman is shaping clay.

Woolman is washing chickens in warm, soapy water, and then blow drying them next to a crackling fire.

Woolman is shoveling cow shit, and enjoying it.

Woolman is solitude.

Woolman is chaos.

Woolman is feeling like I'm in a glass chamber with no oxygen but lots of colorful smoke to distract me.

Woolman is gaining a connection to the land that's tangible and ready to be expanded.

Woolman is being a tree, growing new rings as I battle rainstorms and blizzards.

Woolman is carrying on.

Pain.

Woolman is beautiful.

Woolman, I love you, as well as your...

turkeys
people
vegetables
sunsets
grass
cows
oxidation ponds

And patchwork of different lives, beliefs, and actions.

Goodbye, but certainly not for good.

Thank you.



Dear Woolman,

Thank you very much for helping me learn, grow, and heal. I have been challenged regularly to take alternative perspectives and to think creatively about challenges.

The serenity and energy on campus is rejuvenating. There seem to be powerful attractors at work here that bring activists, innovators, healers, and progressive minded individuals together.

It is inspiring to see the ripples of this place, these people, and spirit propagate outward into our global community.

With gratitude and love,

-Brylie ☺ley

May 11, 2011

Dear Woolman,

Today, on this beautiful spring afternoon, I entered your forest with a mission. This was unusual for me. Often, when I enter the forest, it is to escape all missions and goals. To release all of the tension in my muscles and the listswinning through my brain. Every stressful thought is chased away by the sound of the creek, the bright yellow blossoms that cluster in the meadows, and the reassuring feeling of earth between my fingers.

My mission was simple: The Crystal Tree. This mystical place where the ghosts of the John Woolman School gather. Where they have left their mark on the land. It is, perhaps, the most valuable letter to the land. A monument for the land. Relics of another time hang from the smooth, dark branches; dangling over water bottles, coins and ceramic bowls.

Everyone who goes leaves a possession, a peice of themselves a letter to the land.

Rebecca Levine

Rebecca Levine

Project Proposal

Description: For my sustainability paper, I will construct a creative print-media journal about the power of place at Woolman, focusing on the sustainability of storytelling. I will do this through numerous interviews with past and current members of the community. The project will include both verbatim interviews, and personal responses to these conversations. My personal responses will also investigate my own opinion on place-based education, as well as documenting my experiences at Woolman in relation to the power of place. Additionally, I will implement a "Letters to the Land" living history program for Woolman. Through this program, I will ask community members to write a letter documenting their experiences, specifically focusing on preserving their memories of the landscape for the future.

Relevance to Sustainability: I believe that the art of storytelling preserves invaluable memories and history through conversation and creative writing, creating a powerful sense of place and shared appreciation for the landscape. This is important because such stories and traditions might otherwise be lost.

Goals: My goal for the project is to develop a meaningful collection of stories about Woolman, which will be continued through the "Letters to the Land" program. Additionally, I hope that these stories will inspire perspective students to attend Woolman, likewise encouraging past students to restore their connection to Woolman. Finally, I intend for this journal to creatively document stories about Woolman for future community members.

Anticipated challenges: I will need a way to present the journal successfully, which may be difficult, as I want the stories to be communicated in the best way possible. It may also be difficult for me to complete all the interviews in a timely manner. However, if I plan ahead I am sure that I will be able to both complete the interviews and create the journal.

Interview

Interviewee: Jeff Rennie

Reason for interviewing: "Wilderness Voices" English teacher at Conserve School and an experienced nature writer.

During my interview with Jeff, I realized the significance of engaging in a place, rather than simply hoping that a connection would inevitably arise. Similarly, Jeff defined sense of place as preserving and valuing the unique elements of every location, rather than simply allowing them to become "photo copy places," as sense of place is a fragile, yet powerful entity. Additionally, Jeff discussed the effects of developing a sense of place, for instance explaining that sense of place results in a fierce connection to the land that results in pride and a desire to protect the land. Jeff also communicated that the value of place-based education is the uncovering of invisible connections, likewise stating that he believes it is how education should be.

Jeff also discussed the importance and power of storytelling, explaining that he believes a good story has movement and a journey that results in a revelation of some form. Jeff explained that storytelling is a mirror through which we view our life, as well as the lives of others. I hope that storytelling will be able to artistically represent Woolman's powerful sense of place in a manner that captures the heart and attention of the reader. The most significant thing I learned from my interview with Jeff was that I must choose to actively develop and engage in the land throughout my semester, as it is integral for the success of the project.

Purpose and Power: Sense of Place and Storytelling at Woolman

Gary Snyder, a respected nature poet, once said “We must learn to know, love, and join our place even more than we love our own ideas.” This concept of truly understanding a place, in full view of all its beauty, as well as its weaknesses, has inspired me to do my sustainability project on artistically representing the sense of place found at Woolman through storytelling. As an integral component of humanity, storytelling holds the power to protect the environment through the sharing of knowledge. Used as a tool for obtaining a sense of place, stories stir emotion and passionate protest on behalf of the land. Similarly, sense of place is vital for both the development and well being of an individual, as well as for the long-term health and vitality of a landscape. Additionally, place-based education personalizes and deepens educational experiences, resulting in a newfound relationship between land and knowledge. Storytelling creates a powerful sense of place and shared appreciation for the land. This shared sense of place, when developed, preserves memories and history through conversation and creative writing.

Storytelling communicates the values and ethics necessary for preserving the personal, cultural and environmental integrity of our history, as well as shaping our desired future. In protecting and realizing the personal tales that we each hold dear, we learn to communicate our past in a thoughtful and powerful manner (Whiskey Creek Documents Design). On a personal and cultural level, the non-profit organization StoryCorp records oral history through interviews done between friends or family members (StoryCorp). This organization’s main focus is to “remind one another of our shared humanity, strengthen and build the connections between people, teach the value of listening, and weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that every life matters.”(StoryCorp) Through oral history, StoryCorp is able to create a living history that continues to grow as time progresses (StoryCorp). Preserving environmental integrity requires the context of stories, as they are often used as a rallying cry against environmental degradation. For example, Terry Tempest Williams discusses the power of storytelling in her book “Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert.” Williams acknowledges the power and vital purpose of stories in the conservation movement

(Williams). Specifically discussing the protection of the Utah wilderness, Tempest explains that “story bypasses rhetoric and pierces the heart.”(Williams) Arguing that the path to conservation relies on the sharing of knowledge, Williams insists in her book that storytelling opens minds in support of wild places (Williams). Similarly, many would be unable to truly connect on a deeper level to the lands history without the context of story to create connection (Williams). Thought patterns are created that place story in a context, as “human-memory is story-based” and such tales are vital for understanding important concepts, such as the necessity for environmental stewardship (Whiskey Creek Document Design). Significant for preserving the ethics and value of a place, Storytelling records emotion that inspires passion and a sense of connection needed for efficiently preserving and recording vital personal, cultural, and environmental history for the future.

Sense of place deepens an individual’s personal well being, fortifies relationships through a shared connection to a landscape, and increases a person’s emotional attachment to the conservation of a place. The relationship to a place in the development of a person can have a profound impact on the individual (Stegner). Similar to the Wendell Berry quote “if you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are,” developing a comprehensive understanding of environmental surroundings also helps individuals develop a more realistic and thoughtful conception of themselves (Stegner). Sense of place is often described as an understanding of potential and inspiration found in a specific location, resulting from a connection to a place through the history and shared beauty of a specific landscape (East St. Louis Action Research Project). This shared connection is vital for the health and well being of a community, as it nurtures a pride and fierce admiration for the landscape that results in a powerful community mindset known as “bedrock democracy” (Williams). Additionally, similar to Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic,” the understanding of the land and its value results in a determination to protect the place for future generations, rather than allowing for the exploitation of the environment due to a lack of appreciation (Leopold). Leopold explains that the development of a powerful land ethic cannot “exist without love, respect, and admiration for land and a high regard for its value,” likewise reiterating the concept that “our educational and economic system is headed away

from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land” (Leopold). This “consciousness of land,” also known as sense of place, fuels passionate environmental advocacy and protest against the harmful environmental tendencies (Leopold). Through the development of a connection with the land, communities begin to understand the importance of valuing and appreciating the environmental well being of their homes, likewise redefining the “boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (Leopold). Similarly, place-based educational institutions practice active and intentional integration between location and knowledge, creating a powerful educational experience that truly impacts the individual. Ultimately, sense of place helps individuals construct personal, social, environment, and educational conceptions of their lives and history, which result in a deeper and clearer understanding and appreciation for the land, as well as for the entire communities continued integrity.

The Woolman Semester program, as an example of place-based education, relies on a creating a powerful sense of place in order to create a purposeful and comprehensive learning experience. Similarly, my educational experience thus far has relied on my own willingness to develop a relationship with this unknown landscape. The art of storytelling preserves invaluable knowledge, creating a powerful sense of place and shared appreciation for the land. My goal for this project is to artistically delve into the creative representation of memories in a manner that both inspires and informs. This requires acknowledgement of the altering relationship I hold with this place, as I am still in the process of developing my own connection.

Additionally, this project allows me to investigate the reason behind my desire to preserve the history of a place still unknown to me, as well as help me closely investigate the process and notions connected to place-based education. I feel that becoming “placed” in a specific location is a significant process that one must actively engage in. Therefore, I intend to do significant research for my project through my own written, personal responses to my development of place, as well as through interviews with community members. Sense of place relies on understanding unique perspectives from a diverse group of people, as each place holds many different purposes, while also

connecting these viewpoints in order to understand the similarities between different experiences.

Using conversation and creative writing, storytelling is capable of understanding and investigating sense of place, as well as preserving memories and history for the future. Storytelling expresses the important beliefs of a community, likewise honoring both their unknown history and the place's desired future. Sense of place, vital for personal fulfillment and interpersonal connection, also is very significant in the conservation of a place, both from an environmental and financial perspective. Finally, as a place-based educational community, understanding Woolman's communal sense of place requires both personal and community-wide conversation.

In conclusion, I intend to effectively communicate the power of place experienced at Woolman, focusing on the sustainability of storytelling. Additionally, I will implement a "Letters to the Land" living history program for Woolman, through which community members would write a letter documenting their experiences, specifically focusing on the preserving their memories of the landscape for the future. Gary Snyder once said that of all the communities that we belong "the one thing that is most forgotten, and that has the greatest potential for healing, is place."

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